

Recreation at Stake

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*Coming together
it is easier to work
after our bodies
meet
paper and pen
neither care nor profit
whether we write or
not*

from *Recreation*, Audre Lorde

Audre Lorde's poem *Recreation*¹ is a parallel exploration of writing and of making love, a queering of *ars poetica*, that simultaneously becomes a resignification of what this genre stands for: a poem that speaks of the art of poetry itself, thus mobilising both content and form to perform its meditation. *Recreation* instead sets up the two activities of lovemaking and composing as compenetrating and reciprocal: sex and poetry contour each other as intertwined acts of co-creation, making each other possible in specific ways. Crucially, the living body is implicated in both, equally making and taking in the world its love object and the poem itself. The temporality evoked in Lorde's poem presents us these two activities not as isolated events, however, but as inserted in a sustained, continuous and fluid temporality in which they exist and return as ongoing activities, one flowing into the other and vice versa, in over-spilling cycles that contribute to the making of a bibliography and of a biography. In the joy of repetition, creation is transmuted, it sheds its messianic quality and becomes *recreation*: repeated, the act of creating becomes more akin to *playing* than to labouring: *It is easier to work / after our bodies meet*. The prefix re- opens up creation, allowing it to ripen into its full potential: beyond the single deed that marks the messianic event, the intricate interlacing of gestures and conditions practices that, and, in their diverging unfolding, brings history into being.

¹ Lorde, Audre, 'Recreation', *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997).

I start from Audre Lorde's intuition around the polysemy of *recreation* to put forward this concept as an organisational principle. Via the framework of recreation, I want to think about some of the main political stakes of the forms used by collectivities able to act politically in the present. In what follows, I intend to play with the capacity of *recreation* to hold together multiple meanings and to modulate them from contiguous fields of practice in order to transgress some received ideas around the organisation of cultural production, the locus of creativity and the politics of use of collective pleasures. In other words, I want to transpose the double binding that Lorde ascribed to *recreation*, with its connotations of play, reciprocity, repetition and regeneration, from the realm of intimate, one-to-one relationships – with one's lover, with the blank page – to bear consequence upon the organisation of collective endeavours. I wish to ask how recreation can sustain us in becoming capable of an art and culture measuring up to our epochal conditions (expanding upon the art of writing on offer in her poem) and in generating plural relationships and political love (over-spilling from the original ode to her partner).

The importance of recreation shall become sharper as I move from this notion to what I named, with an admittedly less poetic, yet hopefully effective, play of words: the *recreative industries*². By this term, I name a type of organisation, which has existed in various forms throughout modernity, dedicated to regenerating living labour and sustaining the free time of the oppressed and the exploited against capitalist temporal structuring and valuation – and in opposition to the limitation of an experience of public pleasure as solely organised around work or consumption.

The necessary background for grasping the urgent need for such a project has been largely debated and I will suffice to quickly recall it here. The restructuring of economic production into its financialised and post-Fordist mode has *de facto* reframed all industries as immediately cultural per se³. Already twenty years ago, Paolo Virno noted how the most successful techniques for the management of labour (such as soft powers or informal networking, for instance), as well as the techniques of subjectivation of workers (flexible, invested, ambitious, mobile, opportunist, etc...) that prevail in contemporary business are traceable to the arts and were first experimented with within the cultural industries. Moreover, as Stefano Harney articulated, the contemporary

² As first explored in the context of the II Radical Open Access conference, 'The Ethics of Care', Coventry University, June 2018. The presentation was published with the title 'Towards a Grammar of the Recreative Industries' in *Competition and Cooperation*, Open Humanities Press, June 2018.

³ Virno, Paolo. *A Grammar of the Multitude*. London: Semiotext (e), 2003.

commodity has itself taken on the qualities previously ascribed to the work of art, such as incompleteness, authoriality and performativity⁴.

The last thirty years saw a related burgeoning of the investment policy known as the ‘creative economy’, a framework as rhetorically seductive as it has been untenable. Countless scholars produced arguments and data to confirm the unabashed faulty claims such as those ascribed to the ‘creative industries’, the ‘creative city’ or the ‘creative class’⁵. Nonetheless, these notions have sequestered ‘creativity’ and ‘innovation’ as cornerstones of the contemporary neoliberal imaginaries, and not as tools to dismantle them⁶, leaving us with a possibly historically unprecedented depletion of imaginal resources able to sprawl political consequences for the present.

The notion of the *recreative industries* that I put forward here is thus an effort to name some slighted organising efforts punctuating both neglected histories of class struggles as well as contemporary counter-cultural productions, in order to call to attention and strengthen certain tendencies within them.

Refiguration taking place

Before I turn to the recreative industries proper, a preamble is necessary to contrast them with the dominant framework they seek to shatter – that of the ‘creative economy’, together with its ‘cities’, ‘districts’, ‘classes’ and ‘industries’ – and link this kind of organisation to the specific form of cultural action that it can host.

Mark Bank and Justin O’Connor recently surveyed twenty years of research around the creative industries highlighting how even some of their old proponents are now publicly distancing themselves from previously held beliefs around their viability and capacity to generate positive societal change⁷. The title they chose for their article was ‘Inside the Whale’, an homage to George Orwell’s critical review of Henry Miller’s

⁴ Harney, S. (2010). ‘Unfinished business: Labour, management, and the creative industries.’ *Cultural Studies*, 24(3), 431-444.

⁵ For some early, seminal critiques of the creative industries, see for instance: Bennett T (1998) *Culture: A Reformer’s Science*. London: Sage; Cunningham S (2009) ‘Trojan horse or Rorschach blot? Creative industries discourse around the world.’ *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 15(4): 375–386; Lewis J and Miller T (eds) (2002) *Critical Cultural Policy Studies: A Reader*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell; Lovink, G. and Rossiter, N. (2007). *MyCreativity Reader: A critique of creative industries*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures; Gill, R. and Pratt, A. (2008). ‘In the Social Factory?: Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work.’ *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25(7–8), 1–30; McRobbie A (2002) ‘Clubs to companies: Notes on the decline of political culture in speeded up creative worlds.’ *Cultural Studies* 16(4): 516–531; Ross A (2000) ‘The mental labor problem.’ *Social Text* 18(2): 1–31.

⁶ Cfr. Lorde, Audre. ‘The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.’ (1984) *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press. 110-114. 2007.

⁷ Bank, Mark and O’Connor, Justin. ‘Inside the whale (and how to get out of there): Moving on from two decades of creative industries research’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2017, Vol. 20(6) 637–654.

Tropic of Cancer of the same title. While the authors did not explore the juxtaposition of Orwell's piece in their own article, its urgent, lucid and yet disconsolate overview matches closely the affective politics of my recreative industries proposal. Orwell's essay was a complex meditation on the politics of art, and specifically literature and poetry, written amidst the turmoil of the war in 1940. Looking back at the previous two decades of literary production in the English language, Orwell sought to lay out the nexus between historical conditions, art and politics. He insisted that conformity comes in many forms, not only in the guise of an avoidance of overtly political subject matters, as had happened throughout the 1920s, but also in an obstinacy to produce 'constructive', positive and activist outlooks while the world faced the incommensurable challenges of mass murder and totalitarianism, a vice he insisted characterised the Marxist (yet bourgeois in experience) British writers of the 1930s. For Orwell, the crux of the matter is that the liberal sphere of free speech that allowed for literature was no longer, and that

the all-important fact for the creative writer is going to be that this is not a writer's world. That does not mean that he cannot help to bring the new society into being, but he can take no part in the process as a writer. For as a writer he is a liberal, and what is happening is the destruction of liberalism. [...] Progress and reaction have both turned out to be swindles. Seemingly there is nothing left but quietism — robbing reality of its terrors by simply submitting to it. Get inside the whale — or rather, admit you are inside the whale (for you are, of course).

In praising Miller for his outlook in *Tropic of Cancer*, he simultaneously and ironically decrees the fate of this book: the impossibility of bearing any kind of historical consequence rather than confirming the impossibility of getting out of this comfortable 'womb big enough for an adult'. For Orwell, it is the very attempt to intervene in the politics of the present *as a writer* that is doomed and delusional, as the world requires a different regime of interventions before writing, creating and free thinking can be relevant again.

The creative industries discourse was first generated in the 1990s in Australia and became internationally popular shortly after the New Labour government launched its agenda for a Creative Britain. Unlike the notion of the 'cultural industries', which the scholars of the Frankfurt School invented to critically address the conditions of cultural production in the era of mass industrialisation, the creative industries discourse was not born as a critique of capital, but was conceived from the start as an instrument of direct

intervention in the governance of cities during a profound shift to post-industrial economies. For a short season, the creative agenda provided a convincing rhetoric, a perfect ‘inside the whale’: a political imaginary where economic prosperity was coupled with increased democratic participation. Depleted neighbourhoods were to be regenerated and jobs were going to be fulfilling endeavours. Education, culture, sports, leisure and tourism were going to be financially supported and become the cornerstones of consumption. However, in reality, the creative economy quickly proved to be just one of the many tricks by which capital performs what Marx called its ‘necromancy’⁸. On the one hand, the notion of ‘creativity’ allowed governmental accountants to cluster together various sources of wealth generation⁹, combining profits from intellectual property (such as those of the IT sector), with more traditional, craft-based services (such as hairdressers or florists’ shops) and artistic or cultural productions proper. On the other hand, it normalised the ideology of micro entrepreneurship, introduced metrics for the evaluation of culture via its economic impact, and promoted a new kind of subjectivation, more compatible with the needs of a post-industrial social norm: the self as a hard-working ‘self-facilitating media node’, to borrow an iconic line from the sitcom *Nathan Barley*¹⁰.

This paradigm never delved into the philosophical complexities of the term ‘creativity’, yet it weaponised it to render the regime of private property central to cultural processes. While the generic vocabulary of the ‘new’ – innovation, disruption, change – coloured the language of the rise of neoliberalism to a global paradigm, its political philosophy could be summarised, as Melinda Cooper suggested, as ‘pre-emptive’¹¹: ‘[i]f neoliberalism is prepared to accommodate the new of ‘uncontrolled social forces,’ then, it is only in order to channel them into the constantly reinvented form of private wealth and familial inheritance’¹². By the same token, the networks and communities of practice who made up the fabric of countercultural scenes and minoritarian aesthetics were de facto recast as resources made available in the city-factory, or bulldozed out from urban life. This, in short, is the state of affairs that the recreative industries wants to intervene into and crack open to reveal its necromancy.

⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume One (1867), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/index.htm>.

⁹ See for instance: Garnham, Nicholas, ‘From cultural to creative industries: An analysis of the implications of the ‘creative industries’ approach to arts and media policy making in the United Kingdom’, *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 11: 15–29, 2005.

¹⁰ Produced by Channel 4, 2005. Written by Chris Morris and Charlie Brooker.

¹¹ Cooper, Melinda. *Family values: Between neoliberalism and the new social conservatism*. MIT Press, 2017: 312.

¹² *Ibid.*

By switching to recreation, I want to perform a counter-sorcery, cut the belly of creativity open. The first way to do so is to refuse a grand gesture, so I have simply added the *re-* and avoided the temptations of an *ex nihilo* creation. This would have meant contradicting the message by virtue of performance. Turning now to what the recreative industries stand *for*, rather than against, I return to a regime of cultural practices that I named ‘prefigurative’, after a recent polemical debate that took place in the mid-2000s around the politics of prefiguration within social movements¹³. In political theory, prefiguration emerged as a framework of analysis in the 1960s, to make sense of the new modes of performing the political generated within social movements. It has recently been picked up again to assess the import of experiences such as the Arab Spring, Occupy, Gezi Park and M15, just to mention a few of the most readily recognisable examples. In proposing that prefiguration has much to offer for a contemporary possibility for formulating a political outlook on the artistic practices of our time, I also saw them as an antidote to the pitfalls of both understandings of art as ‘contemporary’ or ‘avant-garde’, in a vein that might not be that distant from Orwell’s. I wished to call attention to the characteristics of cultural practices that perform their political struggles against the conditions of their own taking place, and in ways that make them politically available for other experiences beyond themselves.

The work around prefigurative practices, in the midst of so many *post-*designations that qualify our present, articulated a materialist approach to collective imaginal activities that sought to challenge capitalism on the very ground of the re-appropriation of the conditions of its libidinal production. What is therefore needed now is an articulation of the organisational forms where such figurations can, literally, take place, claiming space and time, in ambiances where it can become possible, literally, to figure things out. How can we conceptualise the techniques of counter-organisation at our disposal, how do we ensure the continuity of prefigurative practices beyond the waves generated through social movements and mass mobilisations? At stake is not only how to find viable forms of resistance – and to constantly renew them against the perpetual mutations of capital – but how to make them politically available beyond the particular experiences that generated them, giving them conditions in which they can *take root*. While prefigurative practices appear ubiquitously across the social body, in unruly ways,

¹³ Graziano, Valeria, ‘Prefigurative Practices. Raw Materials for a Political Positioning of Art, Leaving the Avant-Garde’, *Turn Turtle, Turn! Reenacting the Institute*, eds. Lilia Mestre and Elke Van Campenhout (House on Fire Publications, Alexander Verlag and Live Art Development Agency, 2016).

perhaps undetected or unwelcomed, they can also give rise, sometimes, to unexpected organisational forms.

Junkology: the play of refuse

In order to introduce the stakes of *recreative industries*, I will start from a playground that is also so much more, that appeared in Denmark in the early 1940s, amidst the drama of the war and the Nazi occupation of the country.

In 1943, in the periphery of Emdrup, in the northern outskirts of Copenhagen, a landscape architect named Carl Theodor Sørensen and a pedagogue named Hans Dragehjelm, inaugurated a shared project they had been gestating since the mid-1930s: it was the first ‘Skrammellegepladsen’, a made-up word which in Danish means ‘Junk Playground’¹⁴. This is not just a recreation area where parents can bring their children for some exercise, but a new kind of urban space dedicated to free play, a new kind of pedagogy and a new type of pedagogical organisation. The area is quite ample, surrounded by greenery. Here, children can find a vast variety of waste and scrap materials with which to play and build their own landscapes. In 1935 Sørensen described his vision for the junk playground as:

an area [...] where we should gather, for the amusement of bigger children, all sorts of old scrap that the children from the apartment blocks could be allowed to work with, as the children in the countryside and in the suburbs already have. There could be branches and waste from tree polling and bushes, old cardboard boxes, planks and boards, ‘dead’ cars, old tyres and lots of other things, which would be a joy for healthy boys to use for something. Of course it would look terrible, and of course some kind of order would have to be maintained; but I believe that things would not need to go radically wrong with that sort of situation.¹⁵

¹⁴ The Adventure Playground website reports that: ‘The Danish word ‘*Skrammel*’ means junk, reusable rubbish etc. and ‘*Legepladsen*’ means playground. It is noteworthy that the term ‘*Skrammel*’ has a positive connotation in Danish, whereas the term ‘junk’ has a more negative value in the English language. Over the years, Emdrup has also used the term ‘building playground’.’ – Dighton, Robert, ‘The History of Adventure Play’, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.adventureplay.org.uk/history2.htm>.

¹⁵ Sørensen, Carl Theodor, ‘Etagetusets Have’, *Arkitektens Månedshæfte* (1935), 61. Quoted in: de Coninck-Smith, Ning, *Natural Play in Natural Surroundings. Urban Childhood and Playground Planning in Denmark, c. 1930 – 1950, Working Paper 6* (Odense, Denmark: Odense University Printing Office, 1999).

Sørensen had been already working as a landscape architect for the *Workers' Cooperative Housing Association* since the mid-1920s. It was in this context that he came to the realisation that playgrounds could provide an opportunity to re-create intergenerational and neighbourly relations in a different mode. They can be a place where the environment is shaped by play rather than toil, and where humans young and small congregate around the potentiality of materials in the absence of predetermined rules or purposes beyond creating a commonly enjoyable ambience. The junk playground project yielded profound implications for Sørensen's own role as an urban planner, questioning the authority of specialist knowledge as it encounters others, as he found himself now planning for disorder, carving out a space where things could happen in another way. In the words of Robert Dighton, Sørensen's position went from that of an 'architect' (who held the power and control regarding what play opportunities were made available to children) to facilitator (who passed his power and control to children in order that they themselves could create their own play environments).¹⁶

This was a time when pedagogy too was an effervescent discipline intersecting with many other political concerns. Sørensen's collaborator, the educator Hans Dragehjelm, was well known for being the inventor of the sand-box and also for co-founding the Danish chapter of the Froebel Society, a pioneering initiative to promote progressive education for young children. The society had been initiated some thirty years earlier in England by a cohort of German and British women inspired by Friedrich Froebel's ideas about education. Froebel was among the first advocates demanding 'the provision of special centres for the care and development of children outside the home.'¹⁷ His proposal of the 'kindergarten system' was radical at the time. It emphasised free play with different materials or 'gifts'. It understood human development as being intrinsically linked with interaction with the environment, which should be as meaningful, varied and pleasurable as possible for young humans.

Significantly, Froebel's pedagogical philosophy also influenced landscape architecture during the 1930s, as architects were expected to play a progressive social role by producing the best settings for a comfortable living affordable by all. This sense of shared social responsibility extended, of course, also to children, who were thought to benefit from free play in natural environments. The return to nature as a site of learning

¹⁶ Dighton, Robert, 'The History of Adventure Play', accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.adventureplay.org.uk/history2.htm>.

¹⁷ Mark K. Smith, 'Friedrich Froebel (Fröbel)', *Informal Education Encyclopaedia* (YMCA George Williams College, 1997), <http://infed.org/mobi/fredrich-froebel-frobel/>.

and self-realisation constituted a break from earlier educational beliefs that saw free play in children as a source of concern, as a destructive impulse to be disciplined, suppressed – in one key world, civilised. The dominant views in the 1930s pushed for educational reforms in the name of the right of children to develop ‘naturally’ and in nature, away from the negative environment of cities and urban infrastructures perceived as polluted and corrupting. This was a vision of childhood close to the conception of man as ‘naturally good’ as first theorised by Jean-Jacques Rousseau almost two centuries earlier. In contrast, Dragehjelm and Sørensen’s junk playground broke off from such sentimental views of the natural state: rather than Nature, the experience of human freedom to be passed on to children is realised in an environment that is both *artificial* and *political*.

Another key figure in the new organisational experiment of Sørensen and Dragehjelm was the ‘playleader’, an adult presence employed to offer minimal, non-intrusive supervision and support to the children at play¹⁸. John Bertelsen, who was appointed as the first ‘playleader’ at Emdrup also contributed to the history of the junk playground by inventing the word ‘*skrammologi*’ (‘junkology’) to describe the kind of activities that became possible in such spaces. In the words of Bertelsen, junkology corresponded to an inversion of accepted social norms, whereby ‘all pedagogical and occupational ideas were quickly turned upside down.’¹⁹ He understood his role of supervising children in such a way as to be as unobtrusive as possible, so as not to conflate the adult figure with a figure of authority. He insisted, ‘the initiative must come from the children themselves [...] I cannot, and indeed will not, teach the children anything.’²⁰ In his diary of his time at Emdrup, he described the junk playground as an expression of the conflict between children and the over-regulated urban environment, a context increasingly hostile to the free exercise of the faculty of imagination, so crucial to human development:

[...] the city has become a place where there is no space for the child's imagination and play. Access to all building sites is forbidden to unauthorized persons, there are no trees where the children can climb and play Tarzan. The

¹⁸ In his first proposals, Sørensen did not seem convinced of the necessity of an adult supervisor, but it was the Workers’ Co-operative Housing Association who wanted to hire one, in compliance with its policies. Cfr. Sørensen, Carl Theodor, ‘Etagehusets Have’, *Arkitektens Månedshæfte* (1935).

¹⁹ Bertelsen, John, ‘The Daily Round on a Junk Playground’, *Danish Outlook* 6.6 (1953): 688. Quoted in Kozlovsky, Roy, ‘Adventure Playgrounds and Postwar Reconstruction’, *Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children; An International Reader*, eds. Gutman, Marta and Ning de Coninck-Smith (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

²⁰ Bertelsen, John, ‘Early Experience from Emdrup’, *Adventure Playground*, Bengtsson, Arvid, ed. (New York: Praeger, 1972): 20.

railway station grounds and the common, where they used to be able to fight great battles and have strange adventures, do not exist any more.²¹

Significantly, Bertelsen was also an active member of the Danish Resistance Movement against the Nazi occupation, spending several months in prison for his partisan activities. This was a renowned fact in the neighbourhood of Emdrup, contributing to his reputation and in shaping activities at the playground. It can be said that his commitment to an anti-authoritarian view of society, ‘the culture of bourgeois society’²², continued in his work as educator. Bertelsen’s pedagogy also contributed to progressive pedagogical discussions of the time that insisted on the importance of teaching children the values of the Resistance without conflating its meaning with a vision of violence or disregard for social rules. His writing and biography grappled with the question of how to lead – and foster, as a facilitator – a non-fascist form of life, articulating the crux of the matter of junkology as a praxis: it is not the city that is an enemy of the child, but the rules and protocols that govern the access to it. What emerges from Bertelsen’s writings is also a class analysis of the function of the playground as an emotionally nurturing shelter for working class children, who he described as lacking not so much material goods, but interactions with their parents, often busy with work for long hours.

The philosophy of the junk playground as introduced by its first three organisers therefore articulated a vision of society predicated upon a not-at-all naive concept of self-determination as relational and technologically-enabled, while items de-classified as ruins, garbage, scraps and leftovers embodied a complex position between the natural and artificial condition. What the proposal of the new organisation articulated in practice is that a healthy and joyful childhood must be organised as the experience of one’s capacity of *autonomy* within a *collectivity*. The junk playgrounds enabled an original organisational form whereby children could experience and learn the skills to bring their singular and collective fantasies into being, not as an act of creation, but of re-creation with previously discarded items and materials; they were given the tools to produce their own worlds and each other.

²¹ Bertelsen, John, Personal diary (1946). Quoted in Bengtsson, Arvid, *Adventure Playgrounds* (London: Crosby Lockwood Staples, 1973).

²² Bertelsen, John, quoted in Gadd, Stephen, ‘The Junk Playground – Denmark’s Eco-Contribution to Outdoor School Education’, *The Copenhagen Post*, March 19th 2017. <http://cphpost.dk/history/the-junk-playground-denmarks-eco-contribution-to-outdoor-school-education.html>.

Finally, recreation can be convoked in this story in one last sense. Despite being a large experiment – hosting around 200-400 children per day – Emdrup would have perhaps been an isolated and less known experience if it weren't for the efforts of Marjory Allen, a British landscape architect, to recreate it elsewhere. After a visit, she wrote about the Danish experience for a UK journal and started a movement dedicated to grassroots democratic planning and collective administration of 'adventure playgrounds', which grew to over 75 sites across the country. Allen was an aristocrat and her network held a more conservative vision of the social function of the playgrounds: she promoted their role in preventing juvenile delinquency amongst the urban poor and highlighted their usefulness for the acquisition of employable skills, a utilitarian view that contradicted the spirit of the Danish initiative. Yet, her initial gesture of retelling the story of Emdrup, insisting it to be an excellent form of reuse of bombed sites, led to a recreation movement and the spread of a highly influential idea that impacted the politics of informal pedagogy, especially during the 1960s.

Recreative industries

I departed from the junk playground – not only a space, but foremost a new civic organisation – as it agglutinates the characteristics of the object of knowledge that the speculative expression 'recreative industries' attempts to hold together. What follows is not the theory of all of this, which belongs to a larger project, but it is a prolegomenon to where the concept of the recreative industries can lead to: not an alternative to the creative industries, but an alternative to the capitalist economy hiding within that sector.

Re-

The polysemic potency of the prefix *re-* in recreation goes beyond those activities of recycling and reuse that are key to ecological reparation as in Serge Latouche's '8 R's'²³ (Re-evaluate, Reconceptualize, Restructure, Redistribute, Relocalize, Reduce, Re-use, Recycle), but it simultaneously opens the question of 're-appropriation, revolt and revolution',²⁴ In the most immediate sense, recreation is a repetitive act, as is any form of

²³ Latouche, Serge, *Farewell to Growth* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).

²⁴ This expression is borrowed from RiMaflow, a workers-run, occupied factory in Trezzano sul Naviglio (Milan, Italy) that has been also hatching itself as a recreative industry, out of the empty shell of an automobile components' firm. The slogan written at the entrance of RiMaflow's plant reads: 'Ri' for *rinascita* (rebirth), *riuso* (reuse), *riciclo* (recycling), *riappropriazione* (reappropriation), *reddito* (income), *rivolta* (revolt), *rivoluzione* (revolution)'.

organising. But as in the case of the junk playgrounds, recreation also connotes an act of beginning again. In the case of the spread of the playgrounds, this can be immediately linked to the necessity of dealing with the ruins of what was there before and is now only perceivable as a by-product (the bombed houses of the war, the waste materials of consumerism). Similarly, recreating the possibility of use value in the context of the junk playgrounds referred both to the organising taking place in a context of material scarcity (economic crisis), but also a scarcity that was felt in terms of a lack of room for political action (amidst rising fascism).

-Creativity

At the same time, recreation points to the need to confront the question of creativity on a more sophisticated philosophical ground than the one afforded by the creative industries. Out of junk, it is possible to conjure up something different, to restore use value in unexpected ways. Despite the crisis of credibility, the ideology of the creative industries lingers on: as a toxicity tainting the imaginal and what is at stake in the possibility of creation itself, here limited to a productivist proprietary model. If Fordism enticed people to believe that satisfaction in life could be obtained via affluent consumption, Post-Fordism, and especially the discourse of the Creative Industries exhortation is to seek happiness in relentless productivity. The relentless invocation of ‘creativity’ as an unsurpassable modern value perhaps chokes its revolutionary potential beyond recuperation. And yet, a political critique and affective re-appropriation of the ground this term corresponds to could be staged as a seizing of control of the means of cultural production that in turn shape our subjectivities, as an act of autonomy and relationality. Recreation is a way of naming current tendencies prefiguring what could grow as a discourse of creativity from the ruins of two visions, that of the democratisation of affluent consumption of the industrial phase and the democratisation of creative production of the post-industrial era. Pragmatically, a re-politisation of creativity needs an active opposition to regimes of private property as they are applied to the realm of knowledge production via patents and copyrights, and inventing counter-conduct to the mandatory regime of authorial self-branding.

Industries

The notion of industries in the context of recreation serves as a marker for re-appropriating what our possibility of discussing collective deeds and the organisation of

social cooperation might entail. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri recently sought, in a similar vein, to re-appropriate ‘entrepreneurship’ away from an idea of individual talent thriving in a hierarchical social order and capital-driven chain of causations. In the section of their book *Assembly* concerned with the ‘Entrepreneurship of the Multitudes’, Hardt and Negri revisited this key figure of capitalist’s cultural imaginary via its most renowned theorist, Joseph Schumpeter. According to the latter, the virtue of entrepreneurship boils down to ‘to create new combinations among already existing workers, ideas, technologies, resources, and machines’ and to a number of operations geared towards the ‘continuous expropriation of the cooperative power of the multitude.’²⁵

As Schumpeter explained, the essential quality of entrepreneurship is not to really foster or care for something that is new in a progressive sense of the term, but to master the rules underpinning the possibility of an endless recombination of already existing factors, including machines, resources and affects, optimised to extract capital value both from them directly and from the very operation of reshuffling them (Schumpeter’s ‘creative destruction’). What entrepreneurialism does is to go only for what is profitable or rentable within the new – hence the creative destruction of the old and the backgrounding of social reproduction.

If anyone were to object that the junk playgrounds would not strictly speaking qualify as an ‘industry’, then it would be easy in turn, following Hardt and Negri’s re-appropriation of entrepreneurship as a collective capacity, to argue that indeed this critique would not allow any understanding of the crucial role for the economic cycle of creating different combinations across subjects, tools and infrastructures.

By shifting the discursive terrain from *enterprise* to *industry* however, I want to introduce a crucial aspect of the kinds of operations needed to oppose the culture of capitalist entrepreneurship. There is an interesting gap in the etymology of *industry* and *enterprise* that might support this view. While the root of *industry* connotes an outward movement towards its object, an act of diligence and zealous care, *enterprise* is an action that takes, appropriates. One is about the giving of attention and dedication; the other is about laying claim to something as part of an activity. Raymond Williams, who in his work on cultural keywords also addressed how the use of the adjective ‘creative’ masks the political difference between innovation and novelty²⁶, noticed that the idea of industry

²⁵ Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri, *Assembly* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 143-144.

²⁶ Williams, Raymond, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 46.

went from connoting a certain ‘human quality of sustained application’ to becoming a ‘set of institutions for production’²⁷. Moreover, as Franco Moretti usefully summarised, in the 16th century the initial meaning of ‘industry’

[...] was that of ‘intelligent or clever working; skill, ingenuity, dexterity, or cleverness’. Then, in the mid-sixteenth century, a second meaning emerges – ‘diligence or assiduity ... close and steady application ... exertion, effort’, that soon crystallizes as ‘systematic work or labour; habitual employment in some useful work’. From skill and ingenuity, to systematic exertion; this is how ‘industry’ contributes to bourgeois culture: hard work, replacing the clever variety.²⁸

Both processes, the move from the quality of action to the form of organisation, and from skill to toil, highlight how the current debates around post-work would benefit from a more granular description of what anti-work activities and ways of organising might consist of, what their subjects, procedures and objects (in Marxian terms, their political and technical composition) could be. As artists, as producers, as carers, as lovers, even as patients or the unemployed, we have been told it is of utmost importance that our self-worth and biographical gestures carry an enterprising responsibility. The recreative industries thus find themselves fighting the pressure of managerial rationality. In contrast to this, it would be possible to play with the notion of recreative industrialists as a subjectivity striving precisely for the opposite reason of preventing all of the above-mentioned heterogeneous elements of interest to the entrepreneur from being put to work by capital. Echoing the words of Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James in the introduction to their seminal work on social reproduction:

We inherited a distorted and reformist concept of capital itself, as a series of things which we struggle to plan, control or manage, rather than as a social relation which we struggle to destroy.²⁹

Opposing such managerial rationality means, crucially, to challenge the normalised approaches to the division of labour within organisations and to replace the rampant managerial culture with contra regimes of practice. One suggestion on how to

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁸ Moretti, Franco, *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 31.

²⁹ Dalla Costa, Mariarosa, and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1973), 5.

move away from the processes of subjectivation associated with entrepreneurship comes from Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval in their treatise on the philosophical history of the Common. They returned to the philosophies of Rousseau and Saint-Simon to propose the art of *administration* against that of *management*. While administrative functions might be inevitable functions of any collectivity, capacity of action and creation, they should be organised in manners that counter the power principles of bureaucratic governmentality³⁰.

Creative reproduction

The recreative hypothesis is moreover a political framework for reclaiming the organisation of those semiotic, affective or relational productions that, under capital, stand severed from the other kinds. Crucially, in refusing to confine creativity solely to the realm of production and insisting instead on its import for the realm of social reproduction, the recreative industries undo one of the founding, and most persistent, cultural techniques (of the so-called western canon at least), which predicates the separation of the cultural event from the conditions of its own production, in order to produce a spectacular effect. In this respect, recreative industries are those organisations that refuse to present the cultural value they generate as content for the belly of the whale. The junk playground, by admission of one of its creators, is not an aesthetically resolved piece of architecture. It is ugly, messy, chaotic. Instead, its founders got creative with the organisation of social reproduction in a quotidian and intergenerational sense. How can we bring up our children differently? How do we experiment with the space of everyday community life, how do we set them up differently as spaces of autonomy? Ultimately, how do we redistribute the burden of keeping ourselves alive in this world in the best possible way?

Recreation

Finally, we must turn to *recreation* properly understood as referring to leisurely activities and a time for enjoyment, amusement, fun and pleasure, such as that experienced by the children at play at Emdrup. In Romance languages, recreation is also the name given to school breaks, the pause from mandated classroom activities when children can engage in free play. Recreation at school has been deemed so important by education specialists

³⁰ Dardot, Pierre, Christian Laval, *Del Comune, O Della Rivoluzione Nel 21. Secolo* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2015), 213-215. My translation.

that these leisurely breaks have been included in the Charter of Human Rights as providing essential relief from the disciplined toiling of school work.

By pointing to the political potential of the space that is opened in recreation, I mean to more broadly foreground the unique politics that becomes possible in this interval. The leisurely and playful activities it hosts are not, however, extraneous to the structuring of productive cooperation under capital. Rather than being freely arranged, their form and tempo directly relate and grapple with the bulk of other social relations, their hierarchies and exclusions. How then to conceive of recreation as a politics for free play? In the same way as the junk playground did not need to rely upon a fantasy of return to a separate state of nature, but to the contrary were conceived as part of a cooperative organisation of housing and neighbourhoods, so recreative industries can be thought of as exercises in sustaining ‘the relative autonomy’ that emerged historically for cultural workers, or as Paolo Virno puts it, in the growing gap between what the labour force becomes capable of during time spent in ‘the acquisition and the enrichment of its linguistic-cognitive competences’³¹, that is, in formal and informal education, and the actual drudgery of the tasks they will be hired to perform by capitalist enterprises. Virno identified that this ‘divergence between training and contingent execution is a distinctive trait of contemporary forms of life’ and ‘a seismograph of future conflicts.’³² In other words, the politics of recreation beyond the liminal status of children who are not yet fully part of the workforce consists of what becomes possible in the interval between the wealth of experiences of preparation and the paucity of conditions for execution.

And finally, to add one last point to this exploration of recreation, it must be considered also in its meaning as regeneration, a replenishing of the body. When the concept of recreation first appeared in the English language by way of French during the 14th century, it carried precisely this meaning of ‘refreshment or curing of a sick person’³³: One only has to think of the bursts of energy accompanying children’s break time in schools everywhere to see how ceasing to work can be, in its own right, a healing experience. Yet, the realm of the *recreational* as an area of activities organised and enjoyed away from work (including the shadow work of consumption) and from the relentless duties of social regeneration proper is still under-theorised in discourses that grapple with post-work scenarios. The recreative industries open up this line of

³¹ Virno, Paolo, *L'idea di Mondo: Intelletto Pubblico e Uso della Vita*. (Rome: Quodlibet, 2015), 178.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Online Etymology Dictionary. [<https://www.etymonline.com/>].

investigation by helping to name those organisations that, both today and in the past, have been reclaiming the role of non-productive activities as central to prefiguration, in which another kind of social cooperation is allowed to temporarily become the predominant logic: to experience of the presence of others as a source of pleasure.

It is worth trying to discover just what the organisational mechanisms are that can make the time – and crucially, also the spaces and tools – of recreation available as a political resource for the oppressed and the exploited. Throughout modernity, this is a minoritarian history in comparison to political life understood as participation in a reading public, political meetings and more violent forms of class struggles, one that took root in unexpected contexts, such as an international movement of playgrounds made of junk. In order to grasp what this constellation of recreational mechanisms can generate in the present, we must turn now to a contemporary experience that rather than playing with the debris left over by the bombs of the second world war, took root since the last financial crisis amongst the carcasses of empty buildings left behind by deindustrialisation and within the imaginal void peeping through the cracked horizon of the creative city.

From the Case del Popolo to Occupying Theatres: an Italian chronicle

In the period 2011-2013, Italy, like many other countries, was affected by the financial crisis that triggered – and ideologically justified – a ripple of austerity reforms that cut public spending for welfare provisions. Many Italian cities saw a parallel disinvestment of both capital and state interests, which made a number of empty properties in urban areas available for squatting by other constituencies such as migrants and homeless populations. The same years, however, also saw a peculiar wave of occupations carried out in the name of a different cultural production. Italian activists and cultural workers organised themselves in collectives that entered and reclaimed a number of abandoned buildings, many of which were former infrastructures of welfare, such as schools and theatres, to claim them as ‘commons’ and in the name of ‘civic uses’³⁴. A non-comprehensive list of the spaces reclaimed as part of that wave of cultural occupations includes (in rough chronological order): Nuovo Cinema Palazzo, Rome (April 2011);

³⁴ See: Teatro Valle Occupato, ‘Lo Statuto della Fondazione Teatro Valle Bene Comune’, <http://www.teatrovalleoccupato.it/statuto-fondazione-teatro-valle-bene-comune>, and L’Asilo (Ex Asilo Filangieri), ‘Dichiarazione d’uso civico dell’Asilo’ (2nd January 2016), <http://www.exasilofilangieri.it/regolamento-duso-civico>.

Teatro Valle, Rome (June 2011); Teatro Coppola, Catania (December 2011); Ex Asilo Filangeri, Naples (March 2012); Teatro Garibaldi, Palermo (April 2012); MACAO, Milan (May 2012); Teatro Rossi, Pisa (September 2012); Cinema America Occupato, Rome (November 2012); Teatro Mediterraneo Occupato, Palermo (December 2013); Cavallerizza Irreale, Turin (May 2014); Spin Time Labs, Rome (2014). To these, a couple of other notable examples must also be added: S.a.l.e Docks, active in Venice since 2002, and Angelo Mai, opened in Rome in 2004; while these last two experiences began almost a decade earlier, they have been important nodes of the network and were also early instances of occupations made in the name of opening up spaces for a different cultural and artistic production³⁵.

These squatted cultural centres have, for about a decade now, constituted one of the few living political horizons in the Italian context – which is one where the ruling classes have been extremely hostile towards any cultural practice that is minoritarian, erotic or opaque (or new, innovative and creative, to put it in neoliberal terms). Italy is not, however, particularly exceptional in this respect; the recreative capacities of the network of occupations have also connected them with other international cultural circuits, maintaining a transnational space for the circulation of artistic practices and discourses that is of a different register than those currently made available via the official infrastructures for cultural cooperation. Indeed, the emphasis of the re-politicisation of cultural production, not in the name of art but as a creative reconfiguration of political praxis, and the idea that political struggles are necessarily inserted in different cultures of production, have been one of the cornerstones of the discourse produced by the cultural occupations.

A genealogy of these occupations looking into the historical conditions of their coming into being could go back as far as the second half of the 1800s, when nascent international working-class movements were beginning to make the need for a different society felt across Europe. From meeting in taverns, workers clubs and cafes, the workers movement in countries such as Belgium, Austria, and particularly Italy began to create

³⁵ On 2nd September 2011, two of the cultural centres mentioned above, Teatro Valle and S.a.l.e. Dock, jointly occupied a liberty theatre building in Venice that goes under the name of *Ricreatorio Marinoni*. Its name comes from the original use of the building that, before being turned into a theatre, was created in 1921 to host the play of convalescent children being treated in the nearby Marine Hospice, a sort of proto-institution for art-therapy. Such *ricreatori*, or recreation centres, are a peculiar public institution that only exists in the northeast of Italy, particularly around Trieste, a locality with a strong tradition of radical experimentations with social service provisions (for instance, the anti-asylum movement headed by Franco Basaglia also took root in this area). The *ricreatori* are worth mentioning here as they constitute an early example of a public and laic effort to support and yet, simultaneously govern, the free time of children and youth through informal pedagogical settings.

their own people's houses, a new kind of organisation dedicated specifically to the 'intertwining' of 'political and recreational activities'³⁶ that characterised socialist gatherings. While they had different characteristics in different contexts, people's houses were often founded with great sacrifice by groups of workers who donated money and time to build them from scratch, also because they were often denied the possibility of renting other kinds of rooms as their meetings were considered subversive. They were often set up to host in proximity the coexistence of a varied range of activities, from political assemblies to evening classes, from card playing and boxing to dancing events and concerts. Many also became a node of a different economy by becoming consumer cooperatives, offering basic necessities at discounted rates for members.

Later on, during the 1970s, the Italian context would become renowned internationally for another form of organisation that reunited political and recreational activities: the *centri sociali occupati autogestiti* (or *csoa*, or 'occupied, self-managed social centres' in English). These first emerged as part of the Movement of '77, out of the model of the *centri di proletariato giovanile* (Proletarian Youth Clubs), a slightly different form of association that lasted for a brief season in the mid-seventies. Both experiences – *centri di proletariato giovanile* first and *csoa* – marked a continuity but also a crucial point of break with the legacy of the people's houses, more linked by then to the Communist Party. The aim of the latter had veered more and more towards an educational or leisurely agenda for the working classes,³⁷ the *csoa* emerged as spaces for the militant re-appropriation of that intermingling of the political and the recreational. As the Leoncavallo collective (Milan) put it in a co-investigation on the history of *csoa*:

We are also far from the vision of *csoa* as a ritualisation of the *case del popolo* [...] The *case del popolo*, in fact, despite having played an extraordinary role in the history of the labour movement as places of sociality and territorial points of reference and of 'capture' of the class, delegated the most strictly political functions to the party or the trade union.³⁸

The novel organisational form of *centri sociali* can further be contrasted with the *centri di proletariato giovanile*, with which they briefly co-existed, but that quickly

³⁶ Degl'Innocenti, Maurizio, *Le Case Del Popolo In Europa: Dalle Origini Alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale*. (Florence: Sansoni, 1984), 6.

³⁷ Degl'Innocenti, Maurizio, *Le Case Del Popolo In Europa: Dalle Origini Alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale*. (Florence: Sansoni, 1984).

³⁸ Moroni, Piero, ed., *Centri Sociali: Geografie del Desiderio* (Milan: ShaKe Underground, 1996), 99. My translation.

folded.³⁹ For Primo Moroni, the latter were the last expression of a 20th century relation between plebeian sociability and the accumulation of capital in the city. As long as the elites had their territory clearly demarcated in the prestigious locations of the city centre, they took an active disinterest in the manifestations of other kinds of social productivity in the peripheries, which led to the opening of *centri di proletariato giovanile*. But the imaginal ambition of the *centri di proletariato giovanile* was still the city centre, the conquest of this symbolic space of power. Instead, the passage to the *csoa* model of organisation marked a shift in the spatialisation of desire and the dissolution of the familiar duality of city centre/periphery. The city centre simultaneously ceased to be the symbolic locus of power and it was no longer approachable for the proletarian youth, who used to access it via ‘a path that is for a large part ‘amicable’ and convivial [...] ensured by a concatenation of shops [...] and] of spaces for gathering and entertainment (pubs, taverns, bars, bowls clubs, etc.)’⁴⁰. While the city began its mutation into a polycentric social factory, *centri sociali* resisted such reconfiguration of the material and existential spaces of metropolitan creativity, understanding the need for self-organised cultural and convivial activities as immediately political and not simply propaedeutic. As for the people’s houses, an important aspect was the invention of different modes of cohabitation in the same space, rather than the achievement of an overall coherent aesthetic. One last point to note: the subjectivity of the youth involved in *csoa* introduced a mutation from the previous generations who set up the *case del popolo*. They were, as Moroni portrayed them,

for the vast majority children of proletarians; many of them were initiated to work at a very early age (14-15 years old). The neighbourhood recognises them as part of itself. Spontaneously they feel that something has ended. Their fathers and their older brothers have memories of struggles and imaginaries of distant utopias to be implemented at an undefined, later moment. But to them, it seems that the immediate memory of the previous cycle of struggle has not changed their future prospects and their need for happiness that much. They do not have and do not believe in future horizons: they desire almost spasmodically the ‘here-and-now’ realisation of ‘spaces’ of happiness and full, direct, conscious communication. It

³⁹ To give an example of the short-lived exuberance of the phenomenon, Primo Moroni reports that 52 of them were opened in Milan alone between 1975 and 1976. – Cf. Moroni, Piero, ‘Un certo uso sociale dello spazio urbano’, in Moroni, Piero, ed., *Centri Sociali: Geografie del Desiderio* (Milan: ShaKe Underground, 1996), 172. My translation.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

can be said that the ‘invention of the present’ starts with them and will be prolonged in time throughout the Eighties.⁴¹

Firmly situated in this genealogy, the Italian cultural occupations of the 2010s have been described in terms of ‘new cultural institutions’ or ‘autonomous alterinstitutions’⁴². Yet I want to argue that in fact their organisational specificity can be best grasped from the perspective of the recreative industries. The need to repair abandoned buildings, organise their maintenance and equip them by making do with often recycled materials; the refusal to be cast as centres for the production of ‘political’ art and the insistence instead on generating new cultures of political action; the interest in experimental solutions for the collective care of social reproductive needs; the organisation of tools to allow the maximum free play of the constituencies involved; their investment in practices of collective joy are all characteristics that would contribute to this narration.

Those involved in the occupations, both activists and cultural workers, had to confront the problem of how to make a living while dedicating themselves to maintaining these open and lively spaces, how to generate some kind of economy that could enable a diverse participation, while at the same time refusing to turn the occupations into commercial venues. Doing so would have meant giving in to the very self-entrepreneurial logic they wished to dismantle. Moreover, in the Italian context, such as many other cultural institutions dedicated to the production and transmission of living, contemporary cultures, they do not, and never did, enjoy full support from the State apparatus. Through engaging in the struggle to reorganise the processes of cultural production, these occupations both perform a materialist critique of the capitalist economic environment in which they operate, and actively expose the creative industries’ mythologies as bogus. And this is where the example of one of the occupations, MACAO, becomes particularly relevant to examine from the perspective of a politics of recreation.

To Shelter and to Repair: MACAO

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁴² Baravalle, Marco, ‘Tra Governamentalità e Autonomia’, *Opera Viva Magazine*, 3rd August 2018. operavivamagazine.org/alteristituzioni-e-arte/.

Whereas the ideology of the creative industries focused on ideas of virtuosity, productivity, excellence and disruption, all practices that are the handmaiden of ‘corporatisation, flexibilisation and militarisation’⁴³, the recreative industries as we have seen are characterised by amateurisation, gestation, eroticism and regeneration, all terms that hint at the centrality of pleasure for a politics of the common. In this respect, it is both funny and sad that, despite the obsession of business and management studies with metaphorical language, we still lack an image in that discourse capable of describing organisations as sites of production of the possibility of common pleasure for all those involved. For instance, in the classic book *Images of Organization*⁴⁴, organisations are presented as machines, organisms, brains, cultures, political systems, psychic prisons, flux and transformations, instruments of domination, but offer no hints to the possibility of recreation.

In a recent text, MACAO, a squatted cultural centre opened in Milan in 2012, offered itself up as a ‘*rifugio*’⁴⁵, a refuge or a shelter. In Italian, another meaning of this word, used to denote temporary shelter, is a ‘repair’, *riparo*. This double semantic meaning of *riparo* – a shelter and place of repair – establishes a rich and significant connection between a site of respite and rest, and one of mending and regeneration. It also connotes an awareness of the fragility of those structures that are able to offer repair (in both senses of the term), from the underlying violence embedded in most institutional and infrastructural systems under capitalism. To echo Stephen Jackson’s notion of ‘broken world thinking’⁴⁶, to offer itself up as a space of repair is to stand in the ruins of capitalist destruction and coalesce despite the conditions that one occupies would make seem possible in forming a harmonious community, achieving economic prosperity or obtaining artistic excellence.

I want to turn next to the experience of MACAO in more detail precisely to conclude the genealogy of recreation in the Italian context outlined above with a zooming in onto a more granular description of its principal organisational dispositives, which incidentally are also those elements that are consistently omitted by the dominant narrations around the creative industries.

⁴³ Holmes, Brian, ‘Disconnecting the dots of the research triangle: Corporatisation, Flexibilisation and Militarisation in the Creative Industries’, *My Creativity Reader: A Critique of the Creative Industries*, Lovink, Geert and Ned Rossiter, eds. (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2007), 177.

⁴⁴ Gareth, Morgan. *Images of Organization*. (London: Stage, 1986).

⁴⁵ MACAO, ‘Desire Week’, accessed May 1, 2018. <http://www.macaomilano.org/spip.php?rubrique146>.

⁴⁶ Jackson, Steven J., ‘Rethinking Repair’, *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society* (2014): 221-39.

Currently occupying the buildings of a dismissed slaughterhouse (from which it is menaced to be displaced again), MACAO presents itself as ‘an independent centre for art, culture and research that considers artistic production as a vital process for rethinking social change and for elaborating independent political critique.’⁴⁷ MACAO began in 2012 with the occupation of a different building, an empty skyscraper in the centre of Milan. A crowd of cultural and creative workers entered Torre Gualfa to protest the systemic negligence of public support to cultural provisions in the city and across the country, the unbearable levels of precarisation faced by those who make a living in the cultural and creative sectors, and the lack of future awaiting students in these areas. In denouncing the endemic corruption of the Italian political system and the embarrassing levels of ignorance of decision makers ruling over the country’s culture industries, the activists reclaimed a space to put forward a different vision of society. Maddalena Fragnito, one of MACAO’s activists whose words I will rely on for this description, summarised some of the key concerns that inspire this collective’s experimentation with organisational forms:

What desires define a new institution? How is an institution designed and how is it used? Who decides? How does a changeable community relate to organisational forms? What is the relationship between a collective that transits through such a space and the technology that is used for its organisation?⁴⁸

The self-management of MACAO is organised around a number of techniques and devices. There are weekly political meetings and a quarterly scheduling meeting that represent ‘the principal means through which a changing community of a hundred people governs itself’⁴⁹ and the place where decisions around the application of different workflows and activities are discussed and renegotiated over time. Beyond these two recurring appointments, the collective invented names for a number of ‘continuous functions’ that are necessarily undertaken for securing the quotidian existence of MACAO both as a physical space and as a collectivity. These include: communication with the press, office work and accounting, technical operations linked to the production of specific performances and live events, and the logistical management of the storage

⁴⁷ Fragnito, Maddalena, ‘Key Concepts for a New Cultural Institution’, *Competition and Cooperation* (Coventry, Post Office Press, Rope Press and Open Humanities Press, 2018), 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

facilities. A number of open working groups autonomously coordinate the labour of participants around the tasks that require addressing in each area.

There is the function called *Curami*, an imperative reflexive verb that in Italian plays with the double meaning of ‘Look after me’ and ‘Heal me’. This is the administrative tool by which the MACAO community takes care of its collective maintenance as a physical space in need of cyclical acts of cleaning, tidying up, restocking and refurbishing. Each week, a spreadsheet with the list of necessary activities is thus circulated via MACAO’s main chat room, to which people respond by filling in their availability for certain tasks. ‘In this way the activity of ‘looking after’ is transferred to a public space, named and paid for’⁵⁰, landing a different status to the role of reproductive labour and collectivising the responsibility to attend to it. Moreover,

This shared maintenance is understood as an attempt to overcome the barriers between what is intended as work and what is defined as artwork (Ukeles 1969). Here, the physical nature of the space is seen as an opportunity to stay together, its maintenance as a demand for acceptable living conditions, and the resulting relationships that emerge as an area of artistic and political production. Indeed, the maintenance of MACAO’s physical space has a lot to do with the care for the relationships that inhabit it.

Before the procedure was prototyped, maintenance work was invisible and exploitative (Federici 2012, 28), while the inability to overcome personal settings and comfort zones was producing a sharp divide between those who write and those who fix cables, between those who speak and those others who line up the chairs. As a consequence, it was hard to grasp the complexity of what was happening within such compartmentalised dimensions, and the competitiveness between different groups was taking time away from more important aspects of MACAO as a cultural institution. The introduction of a procedure for the shared and explicit maintenance of the place, however, has brought a more profound understanding of the workings of the machine/institution, and has made it possible to collocate every action within a dimension of co-dependency with all the other activities that surround it and give it substance. Those who do not wish to contribute to the maintenance of the place do not access the tools of mutualism that the community has given itself, but take part in the activities and scheduling

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

of the place. Curami, as a tool, has not deprived people of their inclinations; on the contrary, they have benefitted from this instrument in relational terms.⁵¹

The work of artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles that is cited here as an inspiration was amongst the first to broach the problematic and systematic invisibilisation of maintenance work not only in the cultural sector, but in virtually all relationships that underpin infrastructural functionality within capitalism. In one of her seminal performances for instance, Ukeles washed the staircase of the Wadsworth Atheneum's entrance⁵². MACAO's attention to the socio-political affordances of the physical proximity necessary for the social maintenance of a space in good workable conditions goes beyond Ukeles' interventions, which remained limited to a regime of symbolic representation. MACAO is about redefining the *conditions* of production of that very symbolic regime.

Another of the continuous functions involves the participation, on behalf of MACAO's collectivity, in broader struggles, militant networks and campaigns, such as *Non Una di Meno* (the Italian chapter of the recent international feminist mobilisations), FairCoop, and No One Is Illegal, as well as other institutions. This function names the necessity for MACAO to exist as part of a broader ecology of practices, and also its political responsibility for contributing to the broader political struggles and in solidarity with constituencies beyond its immediate locality.

The *Take Care!* function names the labour involved to undo and prevent sexism and other forms of violence in MACAO, striving to denaturalise certain entrenched machist forms of abuse that pass as cultural norms of behaviour and stimulate an ongoing reflection within the broader MACAO community. Recent initiatives in this sense included the use of antisexist and antiracist messages as entrance stamps for events and the presence of an identifiable care team during large events like concerts and parties.

Yet another continuous function active at the time of writing is '*Come In!*', the open meeting to welcome newcomers, introduce them to MACAO's principal mechanisms of self-management and gather proposals for new initiatives to be organised in the space. 'This is possibly the most delicate moment of the relation between the cultural centre and the city,' – explains Fragnito – 'in that it represents the main access

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁵² Laderman Ukeles, Mierle. *Hartford Wash: Washing, Tracks, Maintenance—Outside and Inside*. Live performance, July 1973.

point for a different way of production. The hardest issue to manage, which is the question of ‘who’s in charge,’ comes into play precisely at this moment⁵³.

The participation in MACAO’s maintenance via the ‘continuous functions’ is remunerated in Common Coin, the community’s currency, and it also allows participants to access MACAO’s own Basic Income system. Taking care of ‘continuous functions’ is compensated according to tasks and not by calculating the time invested in them. This was a decision the collective took to experiment with measures able to discourage mechanisms of over-investment in working ethics and sacrificial approaches to political activism, in an effort to articulate a possible politics supporting the experience of collectivity as pleasure.

MACAO has been experimenting with its own system of alternative currency and distribution of basic income, generated via a percentage taken from tickets to events, bar sales, venue hires and projects financed via institutional collaborations and other grants. The mechanisms that regulate the redistribution of collectively-generated wealth is one of the most interesting aspects of MACAO’s political experience, even more than the technology it uses (Common Coin is a virtual currency inserted in the broader network of FairCoin, the virtual money experiment of the international cooperative FairCoop). Rather than relying on a techno-solutionist approach that confers a thaumaturgical power to cryptocurrencies, MACAO’s basic income mechanism is grounded in the refusal of both ‘political and cultural volunteering and the idea of the wage’⁵⁴. The basic income (currently oscillating between 200-400 Euros) can be claimed only by those who are active in a set number of different continuous functions during any given month (at least two assemblies, one Continuous Functions, one *Curami* action and one networking group per month – although this number can also be negotiated for individual participants to accommodate specific needs). If someone fails to or is not interested in meeting the requirements to access the basic income, this person will still be remunerated via a proportionate sum of Common Coins. The measure of paying for tasks rather than per hour is meant to be a dispositive to discourage overwork and burnouts, as over-commitment does not increase the total sum received during any given month. As Fragnito puts it ‘*it is not the quantity of work that is rewarded but rather the intensity of cooperation*’, in an attempt to move away from ‘*the prevailing ethics of work*’.⁵⁵ While

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

this measure remains experimental and partial, as it could allow for different kinds of devaluation of labour to remain undetected, it can nonetheless become a powerful tool to reflect on the very problem of value attributed to different activities while these tools remain open to modifications by the collectivity.

Through the creation of these new administrative devices and the effort of naming its constitutive relations, MACAO went much beyond the simple games of metaphors often played by those contemporary cultural institutions that call themselves ‘lab’ or ‘school’ or perhaps ‘assembly’, without really engaging with different models of organisation. MACAO is a relevant instance of the politics of recreation as it has been able to host different kinds of cultural production, research and experimentation, spanning across a broad range of media and levels of expertise, while organising its relations and functions along the principle of achieving maximum intrinsic pleasure out of the experience of caring for an institution and constructing common rather than just sharing resources.

Coda

At the time of writing, MACAO is under threat of eviction. Many of the other cultural occupations in Italy have already lost their spaces and disbanded. The future of *csoa* appears similarly bleak in the current political climate. Junk playgrounds and people’s houses have long lost much of their former political energy. Yet to keep these stories alive might be a way of contributing to a politics of recreation opening onto the future. As Anna Tsing and her co-authors wrote in *The Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, ‘we can’t shelter anything we don’t notice’⁵⁶. If the creative economy has been the dominant ideology of the neoliberal *pax*, the recreative industries could be picked up as a conceptual tool to notice the possibilities of organising cultural generation otherwise.

This will be a large project, which in this text I have just touched upon, situated along two axes. The first is an historic line of argument. The tracing of a lineage, within capitalist modernity, of organisational forms that considered social reproduction as entangled with conditions of cultural production. The recreative industries encapsulates a genealogy that spans across a broad temporality, as well as diverse spaces, whenever and wherever modernisation has intervened in the production of culture, mutating its core

⁵⁶ Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt, Nils Bubandt, Elaine Gan, and Heather Anne Swanson, eds., *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 43.

processes of gestation, evolution, propagation and preservation. The second axis is a political discussion of how the recreative industries can intervene within existing cultures of production. These are just two avenues that this concept opens to. One is a subaltern history of economic relations where reproduction is not invisibilised – the other is an opening towards the question of what transforms libidinal economies, where this agency is and how we name it.

The recreative industries always corresponded to exercises in the fragile temporality of sheltering both our labour force, allowing us to experience its potency as it disentangles itself away from capitalist forms of relation, but also to experience our constitutive difference not as something to be merely managed, but as the true source of the pleasure found in the ‘creative function’⁵⁷ of the body politics. Such are the stakes of recreation.

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⁵⁷ Lorde, Audre. ‘The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.’ 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press 2007: 110.

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